

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

All claims 1-23 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a). Claim 1 has been amended to clarify that the claimed process is directed to a post-leaching process to recover a valuable metal, namely nickel. The claims are not directed to the leaching process itself. Support for the amendment in claim 1 can be found at least at page 1 lines 3-12, page 2 lines 20-25, and page 3 lines 5-12 of the specification. Claim 2 has been amended to specify that the concentration refers to the initial concentration of the free acid. Support for the amendment of claim 2 can be found at page 10 line 25. Claims 3, 6, and 7 have been canceled. Claim 4 has been amended so that it now depends from claim 1 in view of the cancellation of claim 3.

Independent claim 1 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Hatch et al. (U.S. 4,410,498) in view of Lussiez et al. (U.S. 4,547,348). The Examiner states that Hatch discloses an improved process for recovering nickel and cobalt from lateritic ores comprising processing the leach liquor obtained by processing the ore by atmospheric and/or pressure leaching. Applicant respectfully disagrees. The process disclosed in Hatch is directed to a process to form a leach liquor. (Hatch at col. 3, lines 10-14.) Hatch teaches the use of “conventional metal recovery processes to win the nickel and cobalt contained therein” from the liquor obtained in the leaching process, i.e. a post-leaching liquor. (Hatch at col. 5, lines 30-34.) In contrast, the present invention provides a process for extracting valuable metals such as nickel and cobalt after obtaining a liquor from a leaching process. In other words, the starting point in the present invention is a leach liquor obtained from a process such as the process disclosed in Hatch. Then, this leach liquor is further processed using the present invention to recover a valuable metal like nickel. Accordingly, Hatch fails to teach each element of the process of the present invention.

Therefore, the Hatch reference fails to teach the process of the present invention, either alone or in combination with Lussiez. At least for these reasons, independent claim 1

and the remaining claims dependent on claim 1, including claims 2, 4-5, and 8-23, are patentable.

For the foregoing reasons, claims 1-2, 4-5, and 8-23 are patentable. Applicant respectfully requests that a Notice of Allowance be issued in this case.

Respectfully submitted,

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